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# Most Americans say colleges should not consider race or ethnicity in admissions

BY NIKKI GRAF



(Glen Cooper/Getty Images)

Note: An [updated version of this post](#) was published on April 26, 2022.

As the debate over college admissions policies reignites, a new [Pew Research Center survey](#) finds that most Americans (73%) say colleges and universities should not consider race or ethnicity when making decisions about student admissions. Just 7% say race should be a major factor in college admissions, while 19% say it should be a minor factor.

The issue emerged again earlier this month when a federal judge heard closing arguments in the [high-profile lawsuit](#) against Harvard University that could eventually reach the U.S. Supreme Court and influence the future of affirmative action in higher education.

While majorities across racial and ethnic groups agree that race should not be a factor in college admissions, white adults are particularly likely to hold this view: 78% say this, compared with 65% of Hispanics, 62% of blacks and 58% of Asians. (Asians were interviewed in English only; for more details, please see "[Race in America 2019](#).)

There are also large partisan gaps on this issue. Republicans and those who lean toward the Republican Party are far more likely than Democrats and Democratic leaners to say that race or ethnicity should not be a factor in college admissions (85% vs. 63%). These party differences remain when looking only at whites: 88% of white Republicans say that

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colleges should not consider race in college admissions, compared with 66% of white Democrats.

When asked about eight admissions criteria that colleges may consider, high school grades top the list. About two-thirds of Americans (67%) say this should be a major factor; 26% say it should be a minor factor. And while many colleges have stopped requiring standardized test scores as part of the application process, 47% of Americans say these scores should play a major role, while an additional 41% say they should play a minor role. Most Americans also think colleges should take into account community service involvement.

The public is more divided, however, over whether being the first person in the family to go to college should factor into admissions decisions. Some 47% say this should be considered, while 53% say it should not be a factor.

In addition to race or ethnicity, majorities also say that colleges should not consider an applicant's gender (81%), whether a relative attended the school (68%) – a practice known as legacy admissions – or athletic ability (57%) when making decisions.

Across several of these items, views vary by education, with those holding at least a bachelor's degree generally more likely than those with less education to say they should be at least a minor factor in college admissions. For example, college graduates are more likely than those with less education to say colleges should consider race (38% say it should be a major or minor factor vs. 22% among those without a bachelor's degree) or being a first-generation college student (57% vs. 43%) in admissions decisions.

*Correction: This post has been corrected to address an error in the classification of Asian respondents, resulting in some estimates for Asians being changed by 1 to 2 percentage points. Further explanation can be found in our report "Race in America 2019."*

Note: See full topline results and methodology here.

Topics Affirmative Action, Education, Higher Education, Race & Ethnicity

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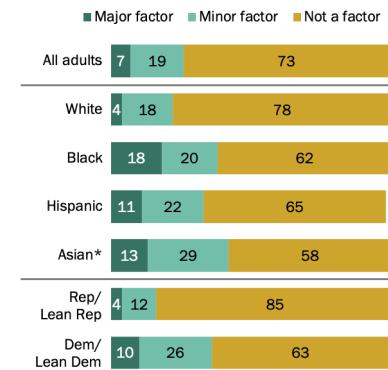
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### Majorities across racial and ethnic groups say colleges should not consider race in admissions

% saying race or ethnicity should be a \_\_\_ in college admissions decisions



\*Asians were interviewed in English only.

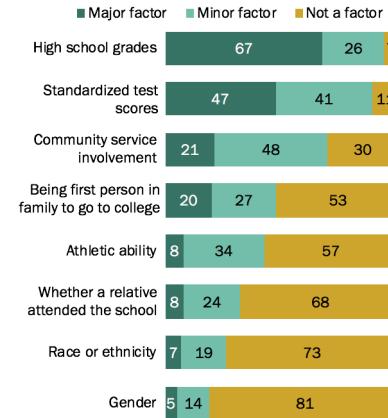
Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown. Whites, blacks and Asians include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 22-Feb. 5, 2019.

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### Grades, test scores top list of factors Americans say should be considered in college admissions

% saying each of the following should be a \_\_\_ in college admissions decisions



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 22-Feb. 5, 2019.

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